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MEMORANDUM FOR: DR. KISSINGER

FROM: JOHN H. HOLDRIDGE

SUBJECT: NVA Infiltration into the Central Highlands

North Vietnamese infiltration into the central highlands--the enemy's B-3 Front--has been a good deal higher during the 1970-71 dry season than it was during the preceding dry season. Since last September about 13,200 troops have been detected moving to the B-3 Front, with another 6,000 possibly headed there. This compares to a total of about 5,000 during the 1969-70 dry season, and it also stands out in contrast to the trends in infiltration to other areas in South Vietnam during these two dry seasons.

Recent evidence indicates that some of the infiltration groups still enroute are towing artillery and moving other equipment. An intercepted NVA message of June 14 disclosed that one of these groups had ten vehicles and was towing seven artillery pieces; a message the next day noted that this group was towing a 122-mm. gun, a weapon which has never been used by the enemy this far south. The message traffic also suggested that 1,200 "weapons technicians" were enroute.

Comment. Earlier this year, the relatively heavy infiltration into the B-3 Front seemed designed to compensate for the fairly severe enemy losses which resulted from the fighting around Fire Support Bases Five and Six. Now, however, the total is such that the enemy is apparently augmenting rather than simply maintaining his personnel strength there. The introduction of the extra artillery will also substantially increase fire power in the region. Finally, the difficulty involved in moving heavy artillery over muddy trails at this time of the year suggests that the enemy may plan to use it in the near future, perhaps before the South Vietnamese elections in October.

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South Vietnamese forces are not strong in this area. During the fighting around Fire Support Base Six earlier this spring, MR II Commander General Dzu was forced to employ nearly all of his reserve forces from the coastal areas. Even then, it was primarily the effectiveness of close-in B-52 strikes that broke the enemy assault. Indeed, one ARVN battalion was overrun during the action, and U. S. military officials have still not been able to get a detailed report on this incident.

U.S. advisers, meanwhile, are expressing more concern about the status of territorial security and pacification in this area, as well as in the adjacent coastal provinces of Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh and Phu Yen. Some of the problems can be attributed to the normal seasonal upsurge in enemy activity. On balance, however, persistent enemy pressure and an uncertain government performance have led to some deterioration in the situation there so far this year.

The Communists have had difficulty in successfully combining main force and guerrilla/infrastructure activities throughout most of South Vietnam, and they may feel that this general region offers the most promising opportunity to register and sustain progress. And, as we have reported previously, COSVN Directive 01 issued under Resolution 10 specifies the highlands as a main force target.

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